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17. ABSTRACT (MAX. 250 WORDS) Because more students than ever before are withdrawing from school without a high school education, school-holding power is receiving increased attention. Studies reveal that students without a formal high school education are headed to dead-end, menial jobs; that relatively few of them will reach the skilled or white-collar occupation classification, and that delinquency is ten times greater among dropouts than among graduates. Automation is fast becoming the dropout's number one competitor.

In schools with high dropout rates the need is for good, competent, well-adjusted instructors to make the curriculum alive, active and dynamic and to provide extra amounts of individual instruction.

It is recommended that assignments and materials should be adapted to the individual learner's level of attainment. Emphasis should be on how much learning is taking place rather than on how much material is being taught. Students should be made to feel successful in handling their school work. The student who senses that the teacher has a genuine, personal interest in him will rarely entertain thoughts of leaving school. The successful teacher of dropouts should be flexible, not rigid; creative, not dull; warm, not cold; informal, not formal; and encouraging, not cynical.

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SCHOOL-HOLDING POWER:

THE DROPOUT AND THE TEACHER

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SCHOOL-HOLDING POWER:
THE DROPOUT AND THE TEACHER

School-holding power is a problem receiving serious consideration today. More students are presently withdrawing from school than ever before without acquiring a high school diploma at a time when the unemployment rate for the nation continues to climb toward a critical level. The distressing part of the unemployment situation is that the greatest percentage of people in the non-working ranks represent a group of individuals 16-to-21 years of age - out of school and out of work. Some are graduates, but the majority are dropouts who found school uninteresting, dull, inadequate and rejecting. Many quit trying academically as early as the second and third grade but remained physically until they were old enough to legally withdraw. Teachers saw these potential school leavers identifying themselves with such symptoms as truancy, under-achievement, retardation in reading and arithmetic, poor work habits, negative attitudes toward school and education and anti-social behavior - to name but a few. Of course, the presence of one of these clues does not necessarily mean a student will leave school. But a combination of them in a single student is a good indication his chances of staying in school until graduation are less favorable. We can assume that the parents of most of these school leavers failed to impress upon them the value of education; we can also assume that a number of teachers did likewise.

WHY DROPOUTS ARE A PROBLEM TODAY

During this present decade, some seven and one-half million youths will drop out of school only to find that employers are demanding more with respect to job skills and education. No longer is eight years of schooling sufficient enough to attract employers. The addition of a year or two of high school doesn't brighten the situation much. Studies show that the majority of students with this type of preparation are doomed to dead-end, menial jobs, and that relatively few of them reach the skilled or white-collar occupation classification. Many will become despondent because their jobs offer no advancement, incentive or increase in pay. Furthermore, the type of jobs they do get will require them to work odd hours, perhaps more than eight hours per day, six or seven days per week. Lacking incentive or motivation, they will likely drift, staying on each job for only a short period of time.

Eventually, even these short-term-type jobs will not be so plentiful. Automation is fast becoming the dropout's number one competitor for them. For example, automation has lessened the need for 50,000 elevator operators in New York City in the last ten years; 8,000 during the past year alone. School dropouts used to find easy employment running elevators just a few years ago. Today, the electric eye has replaced them. The pin setter is another example of the individual who was securely employed a few years back but who is without work because of automation.

With failure after failure vocationally - and probably in many other areas as well, the dropout may be tempted to quit work entirely and collect Welfare. Studies show he makes this decision more readily than does the graduate. He will probably make as much money, if not more, collecting welfare funds than he did when he was employed. When this happens, many tax dollars are lost, and the whole economy suffers.

Over a half million dollars in welfare benefits was distributed in Onondaga County, New York State, during the month of January, 1963. The majority of the funds went to individuals who did not attain a high school diploma. The results are clear: lack of education and lack of job skills marketable in a local economy mean greater susceptibility to unemployment. The more unemployment, the higher the welfare benefits.

Aside from the welfare funds, which in New York State alone take approximately one-third of the state budget, youngsters out of school and out of work become more susceptible to delinquency. Research shows ten times more dropouts than graduates become delinquents. This becomes costly to the taxpayer. Each time a student breaks the law and needs confinement in a correctional institution it costs the taxpayers approximately $2,000. A lengthy confinement can raise this amount considerably.

THE PROBLEM OF HUMAN WASTE

All youngsters who drop out of school do not end up collecting Welfare or serving time in a correctional institution. However, each student that drops out of school rarely ends up contributing to society the talents he has, and this humanistic aspect of the dropout problem should be our major concern. Society is robbed of the lawyers, teachers, plumbers, carpenters and secretaries, etc. in this group. The professional and skilled laborers in the ranks of the school leavers fail to take their place and make their contributions to the nation. This is human waste, and we, nor any nation, can ill-afford this. Prevention of this waste should be of vital concern to us all.

TEACHERS AND SCHOOL-HOLDING POWER

Each teacher has an influence on his students and it begins the day they enter school. Students' views toward education will be affected to a large extent by the way they perceive their instructors and by what happens inside their classrooms. The room must be seen by the learners as a friendly, stimulating and inviting place if we are to keep them interested long enough to graduate or learn a vocational skill. The teacher must be seen as a source of encouragement and inspiration, not as a source of discouragement or rejection. The more positive a teacher's influence can be, the more chances there are a student will choose to remain in school. The school itself must be perceived as a warm and friendly structure. This vision must be planted early in the child's academic career and reinforced continually. Once the decision to leave school has been made, it is next to impossible to persuade the leaver that teachers and others in the school, including the students, are genuinely interested in him.

In any program geared to strengthen school-holding power, the influence of the teacher cannot be underestimated. Good, competent, well-adjusted instructors are needed in schools where large numbers of individuals are known to drop out annually. Teachers who concentrate on disseminating information with little regard for what the student is actually learning can do very little to help him discover education is a pleasure - especially if he is <u>not</u> learning. Teachers must strive to make their curriculum alive, active and dynamic. Being inventive and resourceful, plus providing extra amounts of individual instruction and attention to those that need it <u>must</u> be made a part of the teacher's daily routine.

Assignments and materials, in order to be meaningful, have to be adopted to the individual learner's level of attainment. How much learning is taking place should be highly emphasized rather than how much is being taught. Teachers must see to it that students get some satisfaction from handling school work, particularly that they feel they can successfully complete academic assignments.

Teachers with personality problems can do much to speed up a pupil's decision to quit school. Cold, impersonal educators can do likewise. Teachers with strong feelings of self-worth and confidence are oblicated to help their students develop these same feelings within themselves. The classroom director should have some understanding of students' needs and interests and must see each one of his pupils as a separate entity, a separate human being. He should have some "feel" for the students he instructs. A certain sensitivity and objectivity, free of hostility and prejudice, cannot be lacking in dealing with students and their behavior. Family background and community status has to be set aside. An interest in students because they are human beings is a must. This should be at the top of the list of requirements for teachers in areas where the dropout rate is high. Ideally, this rule should be adhered to regardless of the area assigned.

An insight into a pupil's home experience and environment, coupled with an understanding of human behavior, can do much to implement a student's positive self-concept. The teacher's reaction toward and handling of classroom incident should always be in the light of what is best for the student involved. The learner who sees his instructor as a "regular guy" is less prone toward acting out or becoming hostile. The student who senses that his teacher has a genuine, personal interest in him will scarcely entertain thoughts about leaving him or the place that has developed within him a sense of security and belonging.

Flexible, as opposed to rigid; creative, as opposed to dull; warm, rather than cold; informal, instead of formal; encouraging, not cynical; - these are a few of the personality traits that must be found in the teacher who hopes to assist students identify more positively with the school.